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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC PRIORITY
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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: BURNISHING BERDIMUHAMEDOV'S REGIONAL
COOPERATION CREDENTIALS WITH THE WATER ISSUE

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: A December 2008 article written by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attributed the positive outcome of the October 2008 Bishkek Summit to President Berdimuhamedov's initiative and resourcefulness and portrayed Turkmenistan as a regional leader in Central Asia water cooperation. The article also claimed that Berdimuhamedov was responsible for the attendance of the head of the UN Center for Preventive Diplomacy at the meeting in Bishkek. The five Central Asian states agreed on water sharing and sales of electricity, natural gas, and coal, although implementation was contingent upon bilateral agreements yet to be signed. The concept of swapping water for energy is not new -- during the Soviet era, Moscow also used this mechanism for water management in Central Asia. The MFA piece appears to be geared towards enhancing Berdimuhamedov's image as an emerging leader on regional negotiations. END SUMMARY.

BERDIMUHAMEDOV'S FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES HIGHLIGHTED

13. (U) In December 2008, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published an article in "Democracy and Law" journal entitled "Foreign Policy Initiatives of the President of Turkmenistan: Urgency, Explicitness and Focus for the Welfare of the People." The article praised President Berdimuhamedov's foreign policy activities, specifically with regard to regional cooperation, noting a "series of effective regional water management foreign policy initiatives" that Berdimuhamedov proposed during the meeting of heads of Central Asian states held on October 10, 2008 in Bishkek.

TURKMENISTAN: REGIONAL LEADER IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION?

14. (U) According to the article, the President placed a high priority on the concept that "all issues related to rational use of Central Asia's water resources should be resolved on the basis of mutual respect and universally acknowledged norms and principles of international law." Regional water disputes should be resolved by referring to UN conventions regulating the use of water resources of

transboundary watercourses and international lakes. The MFA claimed that this approach was responsible for Turkmenistan's positive results in resolving transboundary water disputes with neighboring states on the basis of bilateral agreements. Berdimuhamedov's proposal made at the Bishkek Summit called for the development of a balanced solution for regional water issues by sharing water and energy resources in the region. The article concluded by stating that Berdimuhamedov's "comprehensive approach and prioritization of international law norms, respect for universally acknowledged principles and good neighborly relations, and peaceful and mutually acceptable solutions to current problems" contributed to the positive outcome of the Bishkek meeting.

ROLE OF UN CENTER FOR PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY

15. (U) The article stated that the head of the Ashgabat-based UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, Ambassador Miroslav Jenca, attended the meeting at President Berdimuhamedov's invitation. Berdimuhamedov called upon his colleagues in the region to use the resources provided by the UN Center -- which opened in Ashgabat in 2007 -- for discussions about and research on approaches to address regional water and energy issues.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: The agreement worked out in Bishkek has already hit some snags. Turkmen electricity has been unable to reach Tajikistan due to the lack of a transit agreement with the Uzbeks. More generally, the concept of a regional swap of water for energy is not new -- during the Soviet era, Moscow also used this mechanism for water management in Central Asia, but the practice stopped with the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of five independent

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Central Asian states. Since that time, Central Asian states have struggled to come up with a viable regional approach to replace the Soviet system of water management. Various countries have suggested that the UN Center for Preventive Diplomacy consider pursuing regional water issues as a thorny, but unavoidable topic on which the Center could focus its efforts.

17. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: In the meantime, it appears that the MFA is doing its part to burnish Berdimuhamedov's image as an emerging leader on regional issues, albeit for a largely domestic audience. However, it appears that the article is stretching the truth. According to our source, all of the leaders were cooperative during the Bishkek meeting and all of them were amenable to Ambassador Jenca's participation. The agreement was worked out among the five, without any leader serving as main catalyst for a resolution. END COMMENT.

MILES